

Conflicts of Child Marriage in Conflict: Who's Story is Heard

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March 25th 2019, Humanitarian Ethics Conference, PREA

Introduction

- ❖ Child marriage is a global human rights violation; but becomes the concern of humanitarian responses during interventions in conflict contexts
- ❖ Different conflicts present different lived experiences of child brides
- ❖ Challenge of creating humanitarian response that speaks to need but also to belief-systems, traditional values, religious discourses, and non-biomedical frameworks of knowledge
- ❖ Lack of representation of child bride voices leads to categorisations that are at risk of missing the nuances of the life-long narratives that contain the impacts of child marriage
 - ❖ Child marriage is beyond physical and psychological health impacts
 - ❖ Child marriage is also a question of identity and forming of family links and legacies

Overview of Child Marriage

- ❖ **Child Marriage** is defined as a **marriage** of a girl or boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal **marriages** and informal unions in which **children** under the age of 18 live with a partner as if **married**. **Child marriage** affects both girls and boys, but it affects girls disproportionately, especially in South Asia (UNICEF)
• <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-and-humanitarian-crises-June-2016.pdf>
- ❖ All marriage under the age of 18 is child marriage (with parental consent it is legal) but still considered a human rights violation
- ❖ Fragility and conflict impact child-marriage decisions
(<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Changing-Norms-of-Child-Marriage-in-Conflict.pdf>)
- ❖ 'The effects of conflict, including host government policies and forced migration, can also act as a shock to an environment with preexisting drivers of child marriage to facilitate, further incentivize, and even demand the practice of child marriage. Aid organizations, governments, and communities must acknowledge child marriage as a long-term symptom of war that endures after peace is reached' (Zabel, 2016)



Child Marriage in Afghanistan

Culture or Conflict?

Why Afghanistan?

- ❖ Conflict setting for 4 decades, resulting in drivers such as poverty, forced displacement, traditional values and political discourses (national and international)
- ❖ 35% of Afghan girls are married before age 18 and 9% are married before age 15
 - ❖ however, the arrangements often take place much younger, sometimes just a few days after birth, resulting in prolonged psychological trauma
- ❖ 18th highest number of child marriages in the world
- ❖ National Plan to Eliminate Early and Child Marriage established in 2017
 - ❖ Conflict-related challenges to implementation



Shamima Begum

Coercion or Choice?

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- ❖ To School or To Syria? The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon from a Children's Rights Perspective; Rozemarijn van Spaendonck (2016)
(https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/utrecht12&id=178&men_tab=srchresults)

- ❖ Gendered conflicts:

- ❖ Deconstruct dichotomy between victim and perpetrator
 - ❖ 'War plays an important role in the construction of gender, or the social roles of men and women' (Chinkin and Kaldor, 2013)

❖ Conceptualising Child Narratives

- ❖ [Qualitative] Research in conflict, post-conflict, and humanitarian crises on child marriage are predominantly retrospective, i.e. once the 'child bride' has turned 18 years of age and older
- ❖ Creates a marginalisation in the discourse of stories of children married during conflict
- ❖ Stories are an integral part of our self and the meaning we ascribe to the world around us
- ❖ Trauma challenges both our sense of self and the way we view our surrounding world
- ❖ Individuals who suffer trauma are faced with finding new stories to hold their narrative and make sense of the rupture of their world-view

Conclusion

- ❖ Children are not exempt from conflict
- ❖ Conflict presents serious vulnerabilities for human rights violations for children especially girls in the form of child marriage
- ❖ Humanitarian response and critique must represent the lived experiences of children married due to conflict, including during post-conflict periods
 - ❖ These lived experiences are nuanced; magnified by societal-cultural values in peacetime with the erosion of protective measures due to conflict